

“Through a Jewish Lens”

Time:

60 minutes

Materials:

- Laptop, LCD projector and screen
- 1 or 2 generative photographs to project
- Objective/Subjective worksheet
- Flipchart

Design Principle:

Learning will enable individuals to construct their own meaning through inquiry, problem solving, and discovery.

“The involvement of learners in shaping their educational experiences will produce more authentic, powerful learning.”

Overview:

In this lesson, participants practice close-looking and visual literacy skills by making objective and subjective observations of a photograph and then responding to the image through creative writing and text.

Lesson Plan:

Introduction (5 minutes)

1. Ask participants: What is the difference between an “objective fact” and a “subjective interpretation”? Have volunteers from the group give examples of each.
2. Project (or distribute copies of) the photograph.
3. Distribute copies of the Objective and Subjective worksheet
4. Review the worksheet. Explain that an objective observation is something that doesn’t change from person to person. It’s something you can all agree on. For example, “there are X number of people in this photo,” or “the photo is in black-and-white.” Objective observations might also refer to the shapes and textures that can be seen in the photo. A subjective observation, on the other hand, is an opinion, a feeling, or an interpretation based on what you see, such as “it reminds me of the time I did X,” or “I think that man might be their father,” or “I think they look tired.”

Objective and Subjective (20 minutes)

1. THINK: Once participants have grasped the distinction between objective and subjective observations, give them time to study the photograph carefully. Have them note their observations on their worksheets. Give participants plenty of time to work and encourage them to record everything they see or think about the photograph. Even when they claim to be finished, encourage them to go back and make sure there isn't anything they've missed.
2. PAIR: Have participants work with a partner and compare notes.
3. SHARE: Have participants share their observations in a whole-group discussion. Record on the board all the objective and subjective observations the class has come up with, and discuss any questionable or conflicting observations. Invite participants up to direct the looking by pointing to details in the image.

Encourage participants to support their subjective interpretations with objective observations, asking, for example, “Why do you think that?” or “What did you see in the photograph that made you say that?”

4. Ask participants what one can and can't learn from the photograph. What questions does it raise? What additional information would they like to know about it?
5. Also ask participants to consider the composition of the photograph – that is, the way the elements of the photograph work together (angle, focal point, etc.). How does the composition add to the meaning or impact of the photograph?

Creative Response to Photography (20 minutes)

1. Have participants respond in one of the following ways to the photograph:
 - Ask participants to write about the scene, describing what they think happened just before the picture was taken and what they think will happen next.
 - Have participants write a monologue from the point of view of one of the people in the photograph.
 - Have participants paste a photocopy of the image in the center of a piece of white paper and ask them to draw what they think is happening outside the frame of the photo.
 - After reviewing the participants' subjective observations, ask them to create poems about the photo, using the language of their observations. Have participants share their work and discuss the relationship between visual art and poetry.
2. Ask a few participants to share their work with the rest of the class.

Wrap-Up (15 minutes):

1. Discuss
 - a. What kinds of things can you learn from a photograph? What can't you learn?
 - b. How is reading a photograph like reading a text? How is it different?
2. **Explain to participants the difference between *p'shat* and *drash* in the study of traditional Jewish texts. The *p'shat* is the simple, surface meaning of a text; *drash* refers to its interpretation(s). Help participants understand how these concepts apply to reading a photograph.**
3. Share with participants the actual context and background of the photograph you chose to display. Respond to questions and comments.

Learning Extension: Exploring Image and Text (as time allows):

1. Project a new photograph.
2. Prepare and distribute a one-page handout with various Jewish texts that relate to this photograph.
3. Divide the group into pairs or triads.
4. Have each small group read the texts on the handout together and choose one text that they believe connects or resonates best with the photograph.
5. Ask a few of the small groups to share the texts they chose and explain their choices.
6. Distribute cameras (as available) – one for each pair of students.
7. Have each pair go out into the school or synagogue and (without disturbing any classes) take up to 10 photographs that illustrate one of the texts on the handout – either the one they originally selected or a different text that “speaks” to them. The photos can be literal or metaphorical, posed or candid, narrative or poetic.
8. Ask each pair to choose one of their photographs to share. Ask participants to describe the photograph and the text it illustrates.
9. Discuss:
 - a. Were some of the texts harder to illustrate than others? Why?
 - b. How can photographs help convey the essence of a text?